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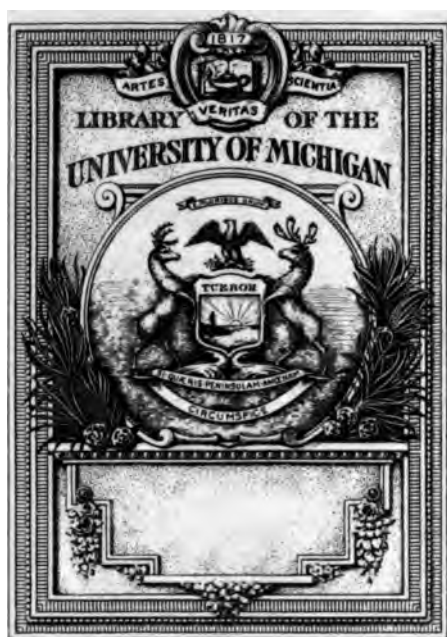
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The  
Story of Grand Rapids  
Michigan




Carol Mary Holt



BEQUEST OF  
MRS. JAMES HUNTLEY CAMPBELL

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles, including "The Hon. Mr. Justice" and "The Hon. Mr. Justice".





George B. Heyman  
Oct. 1915.

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Grand Rapids in 1881, showing Baptist Mission buildings and Noon-Day's house on west side, and Mr. Campan's trading post on the east side of the river. X shows where the Pantlind hotel now stands.



# THE STORY OF GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.

*By*  
CAROL MARY HOLT

INTRODUCTION

*By*  
CHARLES W. GARFIELD



GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.  
1915



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*Request of Mrs James  
Huntley Campbell  
2.6.32*

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## INTRODUCTION

A little girl sat at the Thanksgiving dinner with a lot of grown-ups. The host waited upon all, leaving his little daughter for the last. She watched every movement with anxious interest, but kept herself under pretty good control. Toward the last she became uneasy, wriggled in her chair and heaved long sighs. So when her papa said, "Now what will my precious daughter have?" she threw up her arms, nodded her head with vigor and said, "Oh, I want things and things and things!" This is the attitude of childhood toward the world of information about it. It is the period of easy and wonderful acquirement. Children want to know things and things and things. The problem of the educator is to maintain this as a period of joy rather than of tasks; to keep up the eager desire for knowledge and satisfy it without awakening the feeling that the school period is one to be endured with such fortitude as one can muster.

To this end the gaining of knowledge of the things nearest at hand and reaching towards wider fields is the natural method.

Charles Wagner somewhere in "The Simple Life" says: "First, then, be of your our country, your own city, your own home, your own church,

your own workshop. Then if you can, set out from this to go beyond it."

This is the spirit which should inspire our school methods, and as I have read this contribution by Miss Carol Holt to our school literature, I have been impressed with its value in awakening a joy in historical research which will open the vision of boys and girls to the value of history as a part of their equipment for a life of service.

The known life of the Grand River Valley extends over so brief a period that there is still opportunity for research at original sources and this attractive, even though condensed record, should stimulate the school children to inquiry which will bring out many other interesting facts and incidents not generally known.

I recall with vividness my boyhood talks with "Uncle" Louis Campau, and the exquisite joy of telling my parents and teachers things they did not know which I had found out.

There is nothing quite like the joy of what we think is original discovery in any field of investigation.

A chamber in my house is finished in black walnut which has grown darker with the years until it has reached almost an ebony in color. The lumber was sawed from a walnut tree on the highest ground of the first farmstead in Kent County, occupied by Barney and Harriet Burton. The tree had over two hundred rings of growth, thus recording its two centuries from the sprouting seed to the harvest. It was a great wonder

to the early settlers that this lone walnut should have grown on this high land when no others were to be found except on the river bottom. An aged Indian who came each year to receive his stipend from the Government explained to me when a young lad, that this high ground was chosen by a band of Ottawas from time immemorial as a winter camp, and the underbrush was regularly burned for miles in each direction so an enemy could not approach without being detected. Here children brought walnuts from the river bottom and cracked them to eat with their parched corn during the long winters. It was natural that an occasional nut should slip from the little fingers and become imbedded in the soil. One evidently survived the rough treatment given to most saplings and grew into the tree which marked the camp ground of the savages.

I predict for the children of our schools many happy experiences of this kind as a result of studying this booklet of local history.

How appropriate that a granddaughter of Henry Holt, one of the best known and loved of our pioneers, should have assumed the pleasant task of preparing this history. I recall his self-sacrificing efforts in bringing before the country the advantages of the Grand River Valley as a fruit-growing section, the reward of which we are now reaping in full measure.

The record of the pioneer efforts with its privations and sacrifices, threaded with kindly service, all devoted to the development of a wilderness into

a beautiful and productive domain is an inspiring one, and must arouse in the boys and girls of today a desire to carry on the early effort to even a more pronounced fruition.

Charles W. Garfield.

Pasadena, California,  
March 15, 1915.

## CHAPTER I

## THE INDIANS

ON THE western bank of the O-wash-te-nong, near the rapids of the river were two Indian villages, a short distance apart. Around them were hills and valleys, and the land was covered with trees.

Many kinds of wild animals roamed in the forests, making excellent hunting grounds. There were fish in the river, and wild berries in the woods, so, with the corn which they raised, the Indians had plenty of food. They used a great deal of maple sugar, as they knew how to boil down the sap before the white men came.

In the river just below the rapids, was a chain of four islands, the largest containing nine acres.

The Indians liked this country, as they could go a long distance up or down the river in their canoes, which they made of logs or birch bark, usually of birch bark.

They lived in wigwams made of skins and bark fastened on long straight poles. Some of them were made large enough to hold fifteen or sixteen people. These were long and narrow. The sides were poles, or sometimes young trees, in two rows, and the roofs were made of brush, skins and bark carefully put together so as to make the wigwam comfortable. An opening was left in the top, as



that the smoke from the fire built on the ground below might pass out.

If several families lived together, they made one long opening in the top of the large wigwam for a chimney, and then built several fires in a row, as one fire would not be enough for more than two families.

Their beds were made of poles and twigs covered with grass, reeds, and skins of animals. In the winter they slept close to the fires.

They hung their clothes, moccasins, weapons, and any fancy trinkets they might happen to have, on long slender poles which were fastened near the tops of the wigwams. There they hung also skins and meat to dry.

In the fall when they harvested the corn, they hung the ears on the poles until they were thoroughly dry. Then they took off the kernels and placed them in matting sacks. They put the sacks in boxes made of bark and buried them in the ground. In that way they were able to keep the corn until the next summer, unless they needed to use it before that time.

The braves did the hunting, fishing, and fighting, and left all the other work for the squaws who had to build the wigwams, plant the corn, cure the skins, make the clothing, gather the berries and make the maple sugar.

When they moved from one place to another the squaws had to carry all of the goods so that the braves might be ready to fight. They moved their wigwams with them because with only stone

hatchets and rude copper knives, it was hard to cut new poles.

The first Indian settlers of whom we know were the Sauk or Prairie Indians, a mighty tribe who occupied nearly all of the lower part of Michigan. Then three tribes—the Chippewas, Ottawas and Pottawatomies, came down from the north and attacked them. Many battles were fought, one of them near the place where Grand Rapids now stands, and the Prairie braves were so badly defeated that they disappeared. The country thus gained, of which the Grand River valley was a part, was then used by the victors as a common hunting ground. A great many who came here to hunt were never seen or heard from again. So it became the general belief among the Indians that the spirits of the dead Sauks were dwelling in their hunting grounds and were killing off their hunters, while really it was a few Sauks who had escaped being killed and still lingered around the place, watching for their enemies and killing them whenever they had an opportunity.

Soon, according to the stories told by the old Indians, this land was thought to be haunted, and though there was plenty of game, nobody cared to come here to hunt. Then, it was used as a punishment colony. Every Indian who committed a serious wrong would go of his own accord, or be sent to the haunted ground to escape punishment, as the Indian laws were very strict and their punishment severe.

At last the Grand River valley became the home

of the Ottawas, and several settlements were begun near here. The Chippewas, or Ojibways, as they were sometimes called, settled in the Muskegon valley and the Pottawatomies in the valley of the Kalamazoo River.

As there were more Indians in the Chippewa tribe, their language became the common one, though after a few years it had become so changed that it was not the same in all parts of Michigan.

The Indians loved their life in the wild woods, even in the winter when it was cold and the snow was deep. They loved to gather around their fires at night and tell stories, sing and dance. They often spent the summer around the Grand and Little Traverse Bays in the North. They were usually kind to each other and to the white people as long as the white people were good to them.

Before there were many white settlers here, a Mr. Osborne was once traveling through the forest looking for a good place for a settlement, when he found he had lost his way, and began to feel ill. As he was miles from any white man's cabin, the only thing for him to do was to tie his horse to a tree and lie down in the woods. He took his saddle for a pillow, and wrapped himself up in his blankets as best he could. He was unable to sleep on account of the many noises in the woods. Before long he heard footsteps which seemed to come nearer and nearer, but he was at that time too ill to be afraid and so lay still. Soon a large Indian was standing by his side making signs and trying to tell him something. He

decided that the brave wanted to take him to his village, and so, with the big man's help, he got up and went with him to his wigwam. There the Indian fixed him a bed, built a fire at his feet, and stewed some herbs to make a medicine for him. He was as gentle and careful as anybody could be, and before very long Mr. Osborne felt much better and thought best to continue his journey. The Indian, however, insisted that he stay two or three days, then sent a guide with him so that he could not again lose his way. That camp was in what is now Grand Rapids.

Many mounds have been found containing drinking cups, glass arrow heads, copper needles, pipe stems, bracelets and other ornaments, besides implements made of stone, copper and bone. The Indians told the early settlers that they did not know where these things had come from, but they seemed to regard them with reverence and wished to be buried near them. So there must have been a race of people dwelling here hundreds of years before the white men came.

The Red Men had many beautiful legends and some funny ones. They thought that rattlesnakes were the returned spirits of their dead grandfathers and so no Indian would ever harm one, even if it crawled right into his camp, lest some dreadful punishment should come to him for being disrespectful.

They believed that the Evil Spirit Mitche Manitou caused bad storms and other misfortunes, and that the good spirit Gitche Manitou sent them

many of the good things that they enjoyed in life.

They believed that after death they would all go to the Happy Hunting Ground, and that the flowers, when they withered, went to a place where their petals were made into beautiful rainbows so that people might still see and love them.

They thought that the souls of their departed friends often returned as guardian spirits, in the forms of birds, sometimes doves, sometimes eagles, more often night birds. The kind of bird depended on the nature of the person who had died. If a fearless, untamed warrior died, his spirit-bird would be the eagle; a blood-thirsty chieftain's spirit would appear in the form of a hawk. When a gentle maiden died, her friends would know that her spirit was near them when they heard the mournful music of the turtle-dove at dawn or at twilight.

On the west side of the river, stood a lone tree, far from its brothers, wonderful in its loneliness. It seemed to take pride in being apart from the other trees, and to be perfectly happy in the company of its one friend, the white owl, who lived in its branches and awakened the ear of night with its mournful cry.

The Indians revered the tree and the owl and loved to tell this legend about them.

#### THE LONE TREE

Many, many years ago, before the white men came to this land, Ke-wah-ke-won was the ruler of the people. He was greatly beloved for his kindness and the fairness of his government.





In his day he had been a great warrior, but now he was no longer young and his friends could plainly see that he would soon be roaming in the hunting grounds of the Great Spirit.

He also knew that he could not remain long on earth, so he called all of his people together to give them his blessing and some words of friendly advice. As he lay on his death-bed, his tribe stood around him, eagerly listening for any word he might speak. Suddenly his dim eyes brightened, his faint voice became clear and he spoke.

"My children," he said, "the Great Spirit is calling me and I must obey; his hand is ready to cut the cord which binds me to this earth; my guide is ready to lead me to my fathers in the land of spirits. Mourn not for me, my children, for though I shall go from you, my spirit-bird will guard you. The evening breeze will bear my messages to you, and the morning light will tell you that I have been with you through the night. Lay my body in a quiet spot on the prairie with my tomahawk and pipe by my side. The wild creatures will not disturb me, for the Great Spirit, I know, will guard me. Come to me in the spirit-land, my children. Farewell!"

As he finished speaking, he fell asleep, and those at his bedside knew that he had gone on the long journey.

They buried his body in a quiet spot in the prairie near the river, with his face toward the rising sun.

As time passed on, a tree arose from the grave



and spread out its branches, and a beautiful white owl went there to dwell.

The red men said that the "lone tree" marked the last resting place of the great chief, and that the white owl was the spirit-bird watching over it.

Long after the lone tree had been cut down, the Indians looked with reverence at the spot where it had stood and pointed to the place where slept Ke-wah-ke-won, the beloved of his people.

A large number of their legends were about a trickster known through the generations as Nenabooshoo.

This Nenabooshoo had great power and was able to perform almost any miracle. He was loved and at the same time feared by both old and young. Even the wild things of the forest had great respect for him, and either shunned him or called upon him for his aid, according to the mood in which the trickster happened to be when they met. Many of the queer things in Nature were said to have been done by him. He it was who made the sap thin so that people would have to boil it to make sugar, when originally sugar came from the trees ready for use. He placed the stripes on the tail of the raccoon, and even changed the geography of Michigan whenever it did not suit his particular mood. He was very sly and if anyone tried to find him or watch him do his work he was apt to play some rather unpleasant trick.

#### THE LEGEND OF AUTUMN

Long, long ago all the woods were green—

green. There was no color in the trees but green, until the leaves fell off and made a blanket for the ground. Nenabooshoo grew very tired of so much green, and went down to Lake Michigan to think how he might fix it. He always liked to sit near the big water when he wanted to think, for the waves told him so many things.

For a long time he thought about changing the leaves, then, like a flash, it came to him how he could make the woods wear pretty dresses in the fall.

Going down into the village he took the largest kettle from the chief's wigwam and carried it to the lake. Then he went out into the meadows to the golden rod, and, carrying the yellow flowers to the lake, he shook dew from them into the caldron until it was full.

Nenabooshoo then built up a great fire and all night long he boiled, boiled, boiled the dew. In the morning the kettle was half full of beautiful yellow paint.

Carrying the caldron into the woods, he broke off a branch of balsam which he used for a brush. First he tried leaves of poplar, and painted them, oh, such a beautiful gold! All through the forest he went, painting the poplars shades of yellow. When the sun arose, every poplar in the woods twinkled and shook its golden curls in the morning breeze.

But Trickster was not satisfied. He wanted other colors. Over in the eastern sky where the sun came up, the clouds were rosy, rosy red.

Trickster reached out his right arm and scooped a large handful of the color of morning sky and put it into the caldron.

Again he went into the forest, this time painting the maples the color of dying embers. Some he touched but lightly, while others—my! they were like the campfire flames.

Still Trickster wanted more colors. So he took yellow leaves of poplars and red leaves of maples and boiled them all night long. Next morning he took more colors of the eastern sky and put it in the caldron, making the color not red, or yellow, or orange, but some of each, and oh! so beautiful! With this he touched here and there the leaves of beech, elm and basswood, and colored vines and creepers along the borders of the forest.

But the oak leaves were very stubborn. Not one leaf showed a touch of color. So he took leaves from all the other trees and brewed them together. Again he mixed in some of the eastern sky, and when the paint was very bright, he covered the leaves of the oak trees till they looked like Indian princesses in brilliant coloring.

Trickster then thought his work was done. But when the sun shone on the flame colored forest, he found it not good for his eyes, and he knew that he must do something more.

So out into the Lake where the color was the deepest blue he went, and dipped the caldron full of blue water. Then he went into the meadows and said to the little purple flowers: "Gather the dew for me tonight, please."

All night long Trickster boiled the blue water, and in the morning he gathered the dew from the caps of the purple flowers. This he poured into the boiling water, and when the steam arose, he waved his balsam branch through it, scattering vapor on the breezes. Like a haze it hung over the forest, softening and blending the brilliant colors of autumn.

This was many, many years ago, and Trickster no longer lives as we do. Yet every autumn he comes to change the color of leaves, gathering dew from the flowers and scooping color from the morning sky.

Sometimes, if you go into the woods at night, you can see him stirring paint in his caldron, or painting leaves with his branch of balsam.

## CHAPTER II

## THE COMING OF THE WHITE MEN

**A** CROSS the Atlantic Ocean is a country called France. Many French travelers went to Canada, which is north of us, to see the beautiful country, and while there, bought furs from the Indians.

When they returned to their homes, they told stories of the wonderful land and the friendly Indians they had seen. Many others then wanted to make the trip.

One of these was a young boy named James Marquette. He was born in an old and famous castle near the City of Lyons, France, in the year 1637. He was carefully taught by his Mother until he was seventeen years old. Then he entered a Monastery to finish his studies. He made up his mind that he would like to go to Canada to teach these good Indians. So he studied hard, and in a few years, was ready to start as a missionary.

He crossed the Ocean and spent a few years with the Indians in Canada. They treated him kindly and were glad to learn what he had to teach them. He heard them speak of a group of Indians near St. Mary's Falls, and decided to visit them.

He found these Indians also kind and worked with them three years, gaining at once their love

and respect. They told him of a mighty river which they called the Father of Waters. They had never seen it, but they knew it was somewhere southwest of them and not far away. He longed to find the river and teach the tribes there who were said to be very fierce.

"O Father," said the Indians, "do not go from us. There are fierce tribes who will steal from you and scalp you." But Father Marquette was not afraid, and so he, Father Joliet, and five boatmen, started in little birch canoes from Green Bay, which is an arm of Lake Michigan, to find the great Mississippi River. Sometimes they had to carry their canoes over short stretches of land. When they reached the river they at once started on their trip down toward the mouth.

The first tribes that they met were friendly, and prepared great feasts in honor of their guests. They urged Marquette and his men to stay with them.

"O Blackgown!" they said, "there are fierce tribes down the river ready to scalp you. There are great birds that will swallow you, canoe and all. There are whirlpools that will suck your canoes under."

But still Marquette was not afraid, and after staying some time with the different tribes, he went down the river. He held his peace pipe in his hand to show that he was a friend.

After a time, however, he reached savages who had been treated so cruelly by De Soto and the Spaniards that they believed all strangers were

enemies. He tried to make friends with them but found it was of no use. He saw that unless they turned back they would be killed and could do no more missionary work.

So they turned around, and, after having many hard times on account of savages, rough waters, and great swarms of mosquitos, they reached some of their old friends. They had traveled three thousand miles.

Father Marquette spent the rest of his life working among the Indians, who did all in their power to make the last years of his life comfortable. He started several missions, some of which were in northern Michigan. After his death in 1675, he was buried near his old mission at St. Ignace. The county and city, Marquette, were named for him; also the Pere Marquette Railroad, Pere being the French word for Father.

Early in the 17th century, the French Jesuits went to Mackinac and made headquarters there. They sent out missionaries every little while to visit all of the Indian villages.

On returning, each missionary made a careful report of his trip, telling where he had been, what he had done, and how he had been received by the Indians. These reports were kept at the headquarters, as the missionaries planned to have each village visited as often as possible.

It is supposed that both French and English missionaries had stations along the Grand River two centuries before the valley was settled.

In the latter part of the 17th century, French

traders, trappers and explorers, as well as missionaries, visited the Michigan Indians and did a great deal to improve their habits. They often stayed with the red men in their wigwams, learned their language and some of their ways, and at the same time, taught them many new ways that helped to change their savage nature. They usually found it easy to win the friendship and respect of the Indians.



## CHAPTER III

## THE FUR TRADERS

**A**NOTHER boy in France who wished to go to Canada was Robert LaSalle. His parents were wealthy and gave him a good education. When he was twenty-five years old, he went to Canada expecting to be a fur-trader. He started several trading-posts there, and then came to Michigan, building a trading-post at Mackinaw and a fort at the mouth of the St. Joseph River.

When LaSalle heard of Father Marquette's journey down the Mississippi, he planned to build trading stations all the way down the river. So he went back to France to get the King's permission to build French forts.

When he returned to this country, after going twice to France, he decided to build a boat in which to send his furs around the Great Lakes. So in a grove near the Niagara River, he and his men built one which they called the Griffin. The Indians watched with wonder, some of them friendly, but others afraid and unkind.

When the boat was finished and launched and its white sails were flying in the breeze, the Indians feared that it was some great spirit with monstrous wings. Naturally they dared not do it any harm, especially when they heard the guns which LaSalle put on it.

The party started on a journey in this boat, and after a long time reached an island where Marquette had stopped years before. The Indians were glad to see the white men and loved to watch the Great White Bird floating on the water.

LaSalle bought enough furs to fill the boat and started it back to his fort. It must have been wrecked for nothing was ever heard of it again. This was a great loss and grief to him and his men.

After that LaSalle spent the rest of his life exploring the country. His last years were hard ones, full of disappointments, and after all of his struggles he was finally shot by one of his own men. He will always be remembered as a great explorer because he dared to go where no white people had been before.

After his journeys, many other fur-traders came to this part of the country and several trading-posts were started in Michigan.

During the long cold winter, the Indians gathered and cured a great many furs to sell in the spring. Then as soon as the ice melted, they put them in their canoes and took them to the mouths of the rivers. There the fur-traders bought them. They paid beads, bright pieces of cloth, knives and eatables for the furs at first. Later, when little stores were started, the Indians received money instead of other things.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE ENGLISH

UP to this time the Indians had been taught by the French missionaries and had been dealing with French traders. These people had been very good to them, had treated them fairly, had sometimes lived with them in their wigwams, and had taught them how to do many things. But many English people had also come to this country and soon the two nations began to dispute about their rights.

About the year 1754 the French and Indian war began, and though a great many Indians helped the French, the English won. That meant that the Indians would have to deal in the future with the English. This troubled them for they had heard many unkind stories about the English—that they were proud, dishonest and cruel, and that life with them would be anything but happy.

So one great chief, Pontiac, a tall, dignified man fifty years old, made up his mind to drive the Englishmen from Michigan. In 1761 he went from village to village asking the Indians to gather for a council in April at the rapids of the Grand or “O-wash-te-nong” as they called it, to make plans for a great war.

At this gathering, which was attended by three thousand warriors, he made a long speech telling

of the trouble that would come to his people if the English were allowed to remain in the land. He said that they had driven away the French and would soon turn upon the Indians. He then showed them a large piece of wampum, saying that he had received it from their great father, the King of France, who would soon come to help them.

He found the Indians eager to make war, and two years later when he was ready to attack Detroit, his camp was filled with the red men. The army was divided into groups as there was to be fighting in several places at once.

Pontiac kept the largest part of his army to help him surprise and capture Detroit. He chose sixty chiefs and had each one file off his gun short enough so it could be hidden under his blanket. He told them that when all was ready, they should go with him to the English general, and there he would demand a council, make a speech and hand the general a wampum peace-belt, holding it upside down. At this signal the chiefs should attack the English officers, and the large number of Indians left outside should rush in and kill every Englishman, but spare the French.

All happened as Pontiac had planned until he was ready to make his speech. Then the English general stepped up to one of the chiefs, suddenly drew aside his blanket and showed the hidden weapon. For on the night before, an Indian woman, or perhaps as the legends say, a beautiful Chippewa maiden, had overheard the plans and gone at once to tell the English.

Pontiac, the big brave chief, looked at the general, turned pale and trembled. He saw that his plan was known and that his battle was lost. He tried to explain, but there was nothing for him to say. He and his men were told to leave at once and to never again be seen at the post.

Pontiac continued to disturb the fort, however, until the treaty of peace between the English and the Western Indians was signed in 1764. After that he gave up all hope of saving his people, and went south where he was killed in a quarrel with one of the southern Indians.

After the war, life in this valley was almost unchanged for many years. The English dealt with the red men just as the French had done. They used the same trading-posts and helped the Indians in many ways. New companies were formed and each trader did his best to please the Indians.

Then, instead of meeting them at the river mouths, the traders, with the help of guides and ponies, went far into the woods to meet the Indians and buy the furs before the best ones could be chosen by some other trader.

After the war of 1812, which was between the English and the Americans, a great many Americans came to Michigan. Many wanted to buy land as they thought it would become more valuable.

Others who planned to settle here wanted to own the land without paying for it. They said that the Indians had made themselves owners of the

land by killing another tribe, so that it did not really belong to them, and that the land should by rights belong to those who would till the soil.

The United States Government was anxious to have all dealings just and honest, so appointed the old favorite Governor Cass and his assistant, Solomon Sibley, to make a treaty with the Chippewas (Ojibways), Ottawas, and Pottawatomies. They met in Chicago August 29th, 1821, and decided that the United States should have all the land south of the Grand River excepting small tracts which were reserved for individual Indians, half-breeds and tribes.

These tracts were never to be given or leased by the owners or their heirs to any person without the permission of the President of the United States. The Government promised to pay the Indians for the land, a large sum of money each year, and to pay for a blacksmith, a school teacher, and a person to teach the Indians how to manage their farms and to buy cattle and farming tools. The blacksmith and the teachers were to live on a square mile of land north of the river which was saved for that purpose.

The Treaty, which was a long one, was signed by the two white men and a large number of Indians. The land north of the river was given to the United States by the Treaty of Washington, in 1833.

## CHAPTER V

RIX ROBINSON

**E**ARLY in the Nineteenth Century the American Fur Company started a trading post in the Grand River valley. It was in charge of a French woman, Madame La Framboise, and was located on the banks of the river about two miles west of what is now Lowell. Madame La Framboise stayed there and carried on a successful business with the Indians until the year 1821, when she sold out to Rix Robinson, the first American pioneer in the valley.

That year Mr. Robinson made his way through the trackless forests to the place where the Thornapple River joins the Grand. He was the first white man to settle on what is now Kent County. He was both fur-trader and explorer and established several trading-posts in this valley.

Before coming to Michigan he had trading-posts in Wisconsin and Illinois, and he came across Lake Michigan from what is now Chicago in a canoe, keeping rather close to the shore of the Lake. He stopped first at the Kalamazoo River and built a fort, but not being quite satisfied there, went farther north until he reached the mouth of the Grand. He went up the river and liked the valley so well that he decided to settle here.

He at once won the friendship of the chiefs of

the Ojibways, Ottawas and Pottawatomies and most of the men and women of the three tribes. However, there were a few savages who did not seem to care for the white man and wanted him sent away. So they secretly planned to make his life so unpleasant that he would not want to stay here. If their schemes failed they would ask Nin Mindid, the most powerful Indian in the valley, to enter a contest with the trader, conquer him, and so ruin his reputation among the Indians.

After a three months' trial they saw that Mr. Robinson intended to stay, so they sent for Nin Mindid to come and give him a good beating. The savage was delighted with the idea, but, before beginning his task, he came often to take a good look at his future enemy. Each time he came he made as much noise and bustle as he could, to show the trader how great a man he was.

Mr. Robinson, who had lived long enough at Mackinaw to understand Indian nature, saw at once what they had planned, but seemed very calm during the first and second visits of the savage.

After this the warriors went to their hunting grounds and were gone for weeks. When they returned they camped below the trading post, built their great fires and ate their dinner. Uncle Rix, as Mr. Robinson was called, enjoyed watching them until he saw Nin Mindid and a group of warriors passing a whisky bottle. Then he knew what was about to happen, so he entered his little store, cleared up the floor in front of the counter,



put plenty of small pieces of wood on the fire which burned on the old time hearth-stone, and waited for the Indians to come in. Several old men, squaws and warriors walked in, followed by Nin Mindid, who was rough and noisy.

Mr. Robinson saw that there was no time to lose, so he stepped quietly into the center of the room, asked the men and women to stand back, and told Nin Mindid to leave at once. The Indian grunted and roughly declared that he would not do it. In another moment Uncle Rix seized him, and placed him across the fire. The squaws screamed, the old men grunted and the young men began to laugh at the savage who, a few minutes before, was expecting to have such a merry time beating the trader. Nin Mindid crawled from the fire, looked angrily around, screamed with terror and disappeared. Mr. Robinson had won the day and Nin Mindid was in disgrace.

One day, years afterwards, as Mr. Robinson was paddling his birch bark canoe down the river on his way to Grand Haven he saw what appeared to be an Indian standing on a point of land some distance ahead of him. As he drew nearer he saw that the savage had a gun. In a moment he recognized Nin Mindid, and made up his mind to meet him and fight if he must. However, as he reached the point, the big Indian threw aside his gun and ran toward his conqueror and greeted him joyfully. This was the last time the savage was seen in the district.

Even after Mr. Robinson's victory over Nin

Mindid, some of the savages were not ready to be his friends as they were afraid that he did not know much about hunting. So, to satisfy them, Uncle Rix said that he would enter a contest with as many of them as cared to race. Several of the best Indian hunters were chosen and Mr. Robinson and each of these braves put aside some valuable goods to be given to the one in the contest who could bring back the greatest number of deer at the end of seven days. They parted and each man did his best to make the greatest showing. At the end of the week when they met, Mr. Robinson had forty-nine deer, and the highest Indian score was only forty-two. So he won, not only the prize, but also the respect of all the braves.

For more than ten years he lived peacefully with the red men, traded with them, gave them advice, and made himself a part of their lives.

He was honest and just always, and the tribes learned to have the greatest respect for him. All through Western Michigan he was known as the friend of the Indians.

Mr. Robinson married a Grand River Indian woman, Miss-a-quot-o-quay, and had one son, John, who became an Indian missionary. After the death of Miss-a-quot-o-quay, he married Sippi-quay-daw-ba, the grand-daughter of the great chief, who gave Mr. Robinson a rich hunting ground for his own.

After that he became a settler and bought land until he had seven hundred twenty-one acres of the best farming land in Kent County. He built a

frame house in what is now Ada, and in those days it seemed like a palace, for most of the houses then were wigwams or log huts. People traveled miles to see it.

Mr. Robinson was loved by the white people as well as by the Indians, and many young children were named after him.

When he became old, though he was not much of a talker, once in a great while he would tell of the many experiences of his life; of the nights he was alone in the forests far from people and buildings; of fording streams in winter; of fights with wolves and other animals; of his little house; and of sickness and death in the family, with no doctor near. His memory was filled with true stories, both pleasant and sad, but only to his closest friends did he care to tell them.

When he was eighty years old he went on his last hunt. He had to take a boy along to shoot for him, for although he still knew how to find the deer, he could no longer see to take aim.

That night as he sat around his camp fire with a few of his friends, he talked and told stories until midnight.

One man asked him why he did not write a book telling of his life in the new settlement. He replied that he had started one once and had written several chapters, but when he read them over, there were so many "I's" in them that he was ashamed to think he had said so much about himself, and so destroyed them.

After the little group had broken up, his son

**John told one of the friends that he had heard more of his father's early life that night than he had ever heard before.**

**Mr. Robinson died in the early 70's, leaving a record that made him one of the greatest pioneers of the Grand River valley.**

## CHAPTER VI

## THE MISSION AT GRAND RAPIDS

CHAPTER IV told of a Treaty which the United States made with the Indians. A year or two after that treaty, Rev. Isaac McCoy was appointed superintendent of officers chosen to see that terms of the treaty were carried out.

At that time most of Michigan was a wilderness with here and there a trading post. There were few settlers excepting on the eastern borders, and Detroit was only a fort, the home of the Governor and a few hundred other people. One of the Indian villages at the rapids of the Grand River contained fifty or sixty huts and was ruled over by Kewi-coosh-cum, or Key-way-coosh-cum, the village chief. No roads but well-worn trails led to this little group and there were so few people that an Indian might walk for hours through the forest without meeting a neighbor. Noon-Day, a friendly and industrious Indian, was chief of all the Ottawas.

When Mr. McCoy arrived he found the Indians dissatisfied with the treaty. Kewi-coosh-cum went away and nearly all the villagers were drunk, having secured liquor from some white traders. He spent some time looking for the place which was to be used for a mission. He went down the river nine miles and the next day returned to the village.

to find the inhabitants still stupid from their drunkenness, and the village chief still absent. The third day, the sub-chief told him that Kewicoosh-cum had sent a message asking Mr. McCoy to remain a few days until he should come. This he did not wish to do, because he had work awaiting him at another mission, also because he saw that the Ottawas did not appear to be friendly toward him. They seemed to feel that the white men wanted to deceive them and that the offer of furnishing them with schools, blacksmiths, teachers and tools was just a trick. So Mr. McCoy and his teacher and blacksmith, whom he had brought with him, went away.

In November, 1824, he with three other men again set out for the Ottawas' country, passing through Kalamazoo. There they found that the smithy they had built the year before had been burned by the Indians. One day they camped at Gun Lake and met Noon-Day of Grand Rapids, who was camping there with some members of his tribe.

The next day Mr. McCoy and his party raised camp and traveled on the Grand Rapids trail with Noon-Day and his Indians. They crossed the river in small canoes belonging to the chief, and after deciding on a site for the Baptist mission, began their return journey. Noon-Day went part of the way with them and showed them a salt spring and a bed of gypsum. A small stream of water had washed the bed and had made a roughness like that made on salt-banks by animals. The guide

said that the Indians believed that spirits fed there. Probably this was the gypsum bed afterwards worked at the old plaster-mill where the Grandville Road crosses Plaster Creek.

A short time after that the teacher, blacksmith, and several others started, full of hope, for this new mission, to be named "The Thomas," after a Burmese missionary. But they were disappointed, for, though a few Indians were glad to see them, the greater number were not, and were maddened by their coming. They left in the spring of 1825.

In the fall of the same year Mr. McCoy and a large number of assistants made another trip to the Rapids, bringing with them plows, yokes, chains, farming implements, tools, and cattle, besides hundreds of little things. But even all of the trouble made no impression on the Indians and Mr. McCoy was obliged to give way.

In 1826 he came again and this time a council was held. Noon-Day, speaking to Mr. McCoy, said, "My brother, when you promised to favor us, because our heads might forget, you put your words on paper which could not forget them. Look at this paper and see if it is the same you gave me; notice if we have forgotten anything you promised us."

Mr. McCoy said that he had written that paper and had now come to do as he had promised. He said, "There is the blacksmith, there are the laborers, there are the cattle, the oxen, plows, chains and other farming and mechanical tools.

**The school will be opened in a short time and I am here ready to preach to you."**

**The school was opened Christmas Day, 1826, with five Indian pupils who were fed and clothed by the mission. In four months there were fifteen pupils. When the school was well started Mr. McCoy went back to his other mission, leaving Mr. Leonard Slater, who came to the village early in 1827, and his assistant to take charge of the Thomas Mission. This was located on the West side of the river near what is now the corner of Bridge Street and Front Avenue, where the West side car barns now stand. There were two log houses built by Mr. Slater and his helpers, which were the first buildings ever erected by civilized people on the west banks of the river, excepting a small store house which had been built two miles farther up the river by the American Fur Company before 1777.**

**Mr. Slater taught school and preached in one of the houses, and lived in the other. He worked hard and did a great deal of good among the Indians. Chief Noon-Day was the first convert and about one hundred fifty Indian families were for a time interested in the mission. However, so many of the red men were bitter, and so many who had been friendly for awhile had become scornful, that in 1835 the mission was abandoned.**

**The next year Mr. Slater went to Prairieville and founded a mission for the Indians who had remained faithful, and did not want to move to the new reservations west of the Mississippi River.**



Some of the assistants went with him and together they worked among the red men for several years.

At the foot of the rapids, in a second Indian village, stood a Catholic Mission started by Bishop Baraga in 1833.

When it seemed best to sell the land belonging to the Government Missions, about one hundred sixty acres in all, there was trouble deciding how the proceeds should be divided between the Baptist and the Catholic Societies, as the territory lay between the two stations. Chief Noon-Day, who had moved away when the Baptist Mission was closed, favored the Baptists and worked long and hard to persuade the government that they should be given more than three-fourths of the money. He and his followers had been so helped by the Baptist missionaries that they seemed to overlook the good work which had been done by the Catholics. But the government officers studied the matter carefully and when the property was finally sold in 1845 for \$20,000, \$12,000 went to the Baptists and \$8,000 to the Catholics.

By that time the two societies were able to carry on their church work independently, so the reign of the government schools, shops and smithies in this valley ended forever.

## CHAPTER VII

LOUIS CAMPAU

**I**N 1826, Louis Campau came to Grand Rapids to engage in the fur-trading business. He was the first white settler in Grand Rapids and the third pioneer in Kent County. He was born in Detroit in 1791, and from the time he was eight years old, was brought up by his uncle, who treated him as a servant and gave him just enough education to enable him to read and write the French language. He was always sorry that he was not able, when young, to take a more thorough course in school, for, as a man, he had little or no time for study and he felt the need of an education.

He was a soldier in the war of 1812, and after that was hired by a Detroit company to sell remnants of goods to Indians in the Saginaw valley. Then he worked there as a trader on his own account until 1826, when the Indians urged him to come to the Grand River valley as their trader. He came in November, bringing some hired men and several ponies loaded with supplies for the Indians.

Before he came he got a license from the government, as it had become necessary to have one in order to trade in this state. In this license were eight laws which the traders had to obey. They were:

1. You must trade in your own district only.
2. Your dealings with the Indians must be fair and friendly.
3. You shall attend no Indian councils and send them no messages with wampum.
4. You shall not take liquor of any kind into the Indian country; and you are not to give or sell any to the Indians.
5. If you disobey any of the above laws, the Indians shall have the right to take any of your possessions that they want, and keep them.
6. If you learn that any fur-trader is in business without a license, you shall report him to some Indian agent.
7. You shall tell the Indians Rule V.
8. You shall try to teach the Indians to live in peace, and to pay no attention to any wild stories they may happen to hear.

With two helpers, Mr. Campau spent the winter of 1826 among the Indians of the Grand River valley. The next year he built two log cabins, one for a home and the other to be used for trading purposes. These were on the river bank at or near what is now Huron Street, at the foot of the east side canal. He built also a small shop for a smithy and tool-shed, partly of hewn timber, near the site where the Pantlind hotel now stands. Close to the river's edge over a spring he built a little house in which to keep butter, milk and meat. For six years these were the only buildings on the east side of the river.



MR. AND MRS. LOUIS CAMPAU

[REDACTED]

Mr. Campau and his wife, Sophie de Marsac Campau, for whom the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution was named, made this their home and lived here for a long time. They were always on friendly terms with the Indians and did a large business.

Mr. Campau enjoyed telling one story which showed how honest the Indians were before they had associated long with the white men.

Once while he was traveling near the Rapids his pony died, and as he wanted to go to Detroit for a new pony and more supplies, he hung his trading pack on the limb of a tree near the trail. When he returned he saw that the pack still hung on the limb, but that it was nearly empty. He looked in and found for each article that was gone, a little chip with the totem of the buyer.

As he stood there wondering just what to do, a chief came to him and asked him to enter his village and receive the amount that was due him. He went with the chief and was paid according to the marks on the chips.

As the white men came there was more and more trouble, until stealing became common.

One of the laws that the Indians faithfully enforced was "A life for a life." At one time an American mother engaged a little Indian girl to care for her baby. At first the girl treated the baby as she would have cared for a papoose, allowed it to crawl and roll around, and sometimes tossed it in the air and caught it. She had no idea that a white baby could not stand the same treat-

ment that a papoose enjoyed. The mother asked her to be more careful and she willingly obeyed, but through carelessness, dropped the baby on the floor, killing it at once. Immediately the death song was sung by the savages, the girl was bound a prisoner in the black wigwam and the savages were about to enforce their law when Louis Campau, his relatives and several old settlers went to the Indian village and begged the savages to spare the girl's life. Finally they consented but declared that they would be ready to kill her if the white people should change their minds.

In 1833 Rev. Frederick Baraga, well known as an Indian scholar, settled in Grand Rapids as a resident priest. He had a frame church building erected on the west side of the river. Mr. Campau felt that having the Catholic church on the west side would interfere with the plans for building up the village on the east bank. So the next year the building was carried across the river on the ice, and stood for a long time on Ottawa Street.

After that there were always unpleasant feelings between Mr. Campau and Rev. Baraga, so the latter after a time moved away and the Catholic mission was disorganized until 1835, when Rev. Andrew Voszocsky came and took up the work with great success.

After the government mission property was sold, the Catholics bought land at the corner of Monroe and Ottawa Streets and there built a stone church where the Grand Rapids National City Bank now stands.

This building was somewhat damaged by fire in 1850 when the priest's house next door, containing a thousand valuable church papers was destroyed. The priest's mother and sister were burned to death, while he, thinking they were safe, escaped by jumping from a second story window. The property was finally sold for business purposes.

Some time after Mr. Campau's coming, his three brothers came and settled here. Campau Square, formerly known as Grab Corners, Campau Street, and Antoine Campau Park were named after the family. The Ryerson library was given to the city by Mr. Martin Ryerson, a grandson of Antoine Campau.

All of the Campaus were kind, generous and public-spirited. Mr. and Mrs. Louis Campau always had a hearty welcome for any who came to their house, either strangers or friends. They never stopped to count the cost of anything they did for others.

In 1832 a group of people called the Dexter Colony, came from New York to make a settlement. They had a long hard journey, as they had to make their roads through forests and camp at night wherever they happened to be. They had to cut through brush, go around swamps and marshes and ford streams. Many times the men had to lift the wagons over stumps while the women prepared the meals, and the children scampered about joyfully.

When they reached Detroit, they took with



them such things as could be carried over land and left the rest to be taken by boat around the lakes to the mouth of the Grand River. They bought oxen, cows and supplies in Detroit.

In the party were sixty-three people in six families, each family having its own wagon, tents and cows. The nights when they were far from any building, they pitched the tents together, making one long one, then made twenty-three beds on the ground.

After sixteen days of hard traveling, during which one little boy died of scarlet fever, they reached the Grand River at Lyons. They were hungry as nearly all of their food had given out and they had had no place to get more.

Some of the people stopped at Lyons while others went on to Ionia. After a few days two men started from Ionia for the land office at White Pigeon, passing through Grand Rapids. They happened to meet Louis Campau, who urged them to bring their families here, as much of the land was then for sale. He had bought a large piece of land and was dividing it into lots. As he was a Frenchman, he did not speak the Yankee language very well and he was anxious to have a Yankee settlement here. So these men bought lots near what is now Monroe Avenue for twenty-five dollars each.

Mr. Campau and some of his hired men then went to Ionia with bateaux to bring the rest of the colony. Bateaux were light boats which were much longer than they were wide, and wider at



Old Rathbun House, on corner where the Widdicomb  
Building now stands.



the center than at the ends. The party made several stops on the way back, once at Rix Robinson's home. They saw a great many Indians on the way and as Mr. Campau could talk to them in their own language, he was a help to the party.

They reached Grand Rapids Sunday, June 23, 1833, and landed on the east side of the river near Mr. Campau's house. Mrs. Campau greeted them in a most friendly way and made them like their new home land.

One family whose name was Guild lived in Mr. Campau's fur-packing house while they built a house for themselves. They did their baking and cooking in an open kitchen near the spring house. An oak log was the background for the fireplace, and a wooden crane, a large tin baker and some hooks for kettles, were in the foreground.

The Guild house, which was the first frame house ever built in Grand Rapids, was finished in September. It was on Monroe Avenue where it is crossed by Pearl Street, at the foot of Prospect Hill, which has since been cut away. It was built of lumber bought at an Indian saw mill. It was one and a half stories high and had seven windows and two doors, but no porches.

Travelers often visited Grand Rapids as it began to be known, so the Guild home became something like a hotel.

In this house was held the first township election in 1834, and the first white wedding, when Mr. Guild's daughter, Harriet, was married to Barney Burton, the same year.

And the only one from

On the site where the Widdicomb building now stands, Mr. Campau built a store house for furs and Indian goods. Soon after it was finished he moved from his little log house to this new building.

Then he cleared a piece of land extending south to where the Eagle Hotel now stands and west as far as the river. Here he made a vegetable and flower garden, with shrubbery and trees scattered through it and a few fruits. It was a favorite stopping place for both white people and Indians. The latter, attracted by the flowers, would land from their canoes and go up a well-trodden path to Mr. Campau's house. An old canoe was used for a box in which to plant the seeds and keep the young plants until they were ready to be placed in the garden. The house was afterwards enlarged and made into a four-story building, called the Rathbun House.

From 1833 until 1837 the town grew very fast. Mr. Campau bought up a great deal of land and was for a time wealthy.

He built a good Catholic church on the corner of Monroe and Division Avenues for the use of the St. Andrew's society, which had been formed some years before. The Catholics used that building until 1849. Then there was a misunderstanding about some money matters, so Mr. Campau sold the church, excepting the cross on the spire, to the Congregationalists.

Mr. Campau built himself a beautiful home on Fulton Street where the Gay house now stands.

In 1837 there came a business panic when many prosperous people lost all or a large part of their money. Mr. Campau was one of the unfortunate men who lost a great deal and was almost on the verge of poverty.

When his bank, which had been started a short time before, failed, he took home an armful of worthless paper money called "wild-cat bills" which he used to paper the cupola in his house. He said, "There, if you will not circulate, you will at least stand still." For a few years he was able to do some business and sell enough lots so that he was comfortable.

At the time of the Civil War, there were some camping grounds in this city. Cantonment Anderson was at the corner of Hall Street and Jefferson Avenue where the new South High School now stands. The soldiers were mustered into service in May, 1861, and staid in the city until June 13th. Early in June, thirty-four young ladies, representing the thirty-four states, marched into the camp and gave the soldiers a beautiful silk banner which said, "Presented by the ladies of Grand Rapids to the Third Michigan infantry."

After 1861, Cantonment Anderson was abandoned and the soldiers used a camp called at different times "Camp Kellogg" and "Camp Lee." This ground extended from what is now the site of the Central High School as far north as Michigan Avenue.

While the soldiers were camping there, Mr. Campau invited them one day to come and feast on

the apples in his orchard. He told them to bring sacks so they could take some apples back to the camp.

So, headed by their band, the younger soldiers with sacks over their shoulders, marched down to the orchard. Mr. Campau stood on the porch, and as they passed him, they cheered and the band began to play.

Mr. Campau, generally known as Uncle Louis, loved children, both Indian and white ones, and when at home he was always willing and glad to stop work and wind his musical clock so they could dance.

During the last years of his life he had but little money, as he had paid the debts of his bank with his own cash, so he was helped by his friends, who loved and respected him so much that they could not bear to think of him as being in need of anything they could supply. They raised money and put it in the bank for him, and he was allowed to draw ten dollars a week.

He gave up his beautiful Fulton Street house and spent his last years in a house which now stands on Sheldon Avenue and is the home of Dr. Rutherford.

After the death of his wife, Mr. Campau was a different man. His love for life was gone and he no longer enjoyed the things that had always given him so much pleasure.

He died in 1871 and was buried beside Mrs. Campau in the Catholic cemetery.

## CHAPTER VIII

## THE INDIAN PAYMENT DAY

**I**N THE days of the early settlers, most of the Indians were busy gathering the furs of the beaver, mink, martin, lynx, muskrat, wolf and bear. They also gathered huckleberries, cranberries, and other wild berries to sell to the white settlers.

The squaws and Indian maidens filled birch-bark baskets, called mokirks, with maple sugar, loaded these on their ponies, one on each side of the saddle, and drove through the village selling the sugar. They spent much time making fancy moccasins, which they sold for fifty cents or a dollar a pair.

The Indians liked to share fresh meat with their white neighbors, and would often knock at some white man's door and hand him a large piece of venison.

They liked to trade meat, berries, furs and moccasins for flour, salt, tobacco, sugar, gunpowder, blankets and whiskey, which they called "fire-water."

The old time Indian payment day was the time for a great jubilee. About a thousand Indians of all sizes, from the wee papoose to the old brave, gathered on the lawn in front of the council house near the rapids. There assembled also Frenchmen,



Irishmen, Dutchmen and Yankees, each trying to make more noise than his neighbor. The young boys busied themselves playing with their bows and arrows, wrestling, jumping and shouting, while the dusky maidens sat quietly in their canoes in the river watching the men.

The Indian Superintendent took a list of all the names of the chiefs and heads of Indian families, ready to give each brave the amount due him. The money to be paid was placed upon a table in the large room in piles of American half dollars, each pile amounting to ten or twenty dollars.

Around the table sat the Indian Superintendent, the clerks and an interpreter. Beginning at the top of the list, a crier called off the names, the parties came forward, received their money, and stepped back to make room for others.

After an Indian received his money, a group of men pretending to be his friends, gathered around him, hoping to get something, at least a drink of "fire-water."

In the evening while the drinking Indians were celebrating in the town, the converted natives were encamped upon the opposite side of the river, and the forest echoed with their loud praying, talking and singing. Above all this noise could be heard the fiddle and the "tum tum" of the Indians. After whiskey was forbidden in the Indian districts, the pay-days were as orderly as other days.

Different kinds of provisions were kept at the trading posts. The Indians could go there and buy, and often they could have their goods

charged. Very seldom was an Indian dishonest. They often begged from the white women, but were seldom given anything excepting on New Year's Day. No matter how much food was given to the Indian, he either ate it all, or else ate part of it and carried the rest away in his sack.

## CHAPTER IX

## JOHN BALL AND THE EARLY LIFE

AS the roads in the early days were poor and the villages far apart, it was hard for the early settlers to get the provisions which they needed. Often their main food for days at a time was rice and milk, or potatoes and codfish, or even potatoes and salt. Sometimes they had nothing but bread, butter and onions to serve when they had company.

When they had corn they made their bread for every day use out of corn meal ground by hand in a hollow stump or stone with a huge pounder. If they had white flour they saved it for such occasions as quiltings, weddings, ministers' visits, Thanksgiving and other holidays. Although their food was simple, very few were ever really hungry, and their great hardships seemed to give them courage.

In many houses were attics, reached by ladders from below, where travelers could stop for the night, or for a few days. Often several strangers were sleeping in the same attic, and though many of them had large sums of money with them, few, if any of them, were robbed.

In 1836 John Ball, an eastern lawyer, who had spent much time in traveling and exploring in the west, came to Michigan with \$10,000 to invest for



JOHN BALL



a New York company. He went to Detroit and there learned that Government land was the only safe investment, and that the Grand River country was the best place to go. So he visited the land office at Ionia and then spent the fall and winter selecting and buying large tracts of land in this valley.

In the spring of 1837 he came to Grand Rapids to live, and at once became a most helpful citizen. He went to the State Legislature, practiced law, helped in the banking business and looked after property for eastern land owners.

In 1843 the legislature put a large amount of new land on the market at the rate of about fifty cents an acre. Hearing of this, great numbers of people came to this state hoping to buy fine farms for little money. Many went to Mr. Ball for advice and aid, and found him a great help, as he spent much time looking over the land with them, and also supplied them with funds when necessary. Though most of the new settlers were poor at that time, it meant rapid growth for Kent County.

Most of the white colonists came from the New England states, New York and Ohio, but there were a few who once lived in British America, England, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, Germany, Holland, Norway and Sweden. The Irish came to this village from places not far away, to help dig the canal or mill race. Crops were poor in Norway and Sweden, so many came to America from those countries, hoping to make a better living here.

Hearing of the new town, they came here, and as they liked the place, decided to stay.

All people who came wrote to their friends at home, telling them of the splendid country they had found, and sometimes sent money to help them pay traveling expenses, so they could also come.

The Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad Company sent a man over the country to advertise Michigan, and in that way brought many new settlers to the state. A large number of them came to Kent County.

Mr. Ball's home was on Fulton Street in the house which was afterwards remodeled and owned by Mr. C. H. Leonard and at present belongs to Mr. Covode. He gave to the city much of the valuable land which is now John Ball Park.

When he first came to Grand Rapids, there were a few stores, two taverns, and three saw mills. Banks were opened about that time. There were no bridges across the river, as people drove through when the water was not too high, and used a ferry at other times.

To get from one settlement to another, people often had to make trails on which to travel. The government gave money to pay for the building of a road from Detroit to Grand Rapids, and many other roads were cut. Stage coaches ran over these roads when they could, but for a long time it was impossible to have a set time for starting or returning. Passengers and goods were carried usually in heavy old-fashioned lumber wagons or

little two-wheeled carts drawn by horses or oxen.

When people started on journeys, they could not tell how long they would be riding, for it depended on the weather and roads. After heavy rains, the roads would be so muddy that the holes in them could not be seen. Then if the driver was not very careful, the wagon would tip over and perhaps somebody would be hurt or the wagon would be broken.

One dark stormy night when a stage was several miles from Ada, an axletree broke and the five or six passengers had to wade through the mud and snow to the village.

Another time Mrs. Thomas B. Church, who was for fifty years organist at St. Mark's church, her baby Fred, now a well-known artist, John Ball, and a few others were riding on one of the bad roads when the stage tipped over, throwing them all into a pond of mud. As it was dark, it was some time before they found the baby, who would soon have been drowned.

Mails were carried on horseback or by stage once or twice a week to other towns not far away, when the weather was not too bad.

Rev. Leonard Slater was the first one chosen as keeper of the mail, and Joel Guild was the second.

The first regular Post Office was opened on Monroe Avenue, opposite what is now the Widdi-comb Building, in 1836, with Darius Winsor as postmaster. At that time there was so little mail that it would have been an easy matter for the postmaster to keep it in his pocket. In 1840 the



cost of sending a single letter was twenty-five cents.

The first stages were called "mud-wagons." These were square-box farm wagons with wooden springs inside on which the seats rested. Sometimes they had canvas coverings which were stretched over arched frames, and painted white or yellow to keep the inside of the stage dry.

The next stage was called the "Concord." This ran several times a day after the finishing of the plank road between Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo, of which the present Division Avenue was a part. It was better built and was much more comfortable than the mud-wagon. The body rested upon leather supports or thorough-braces, which gave it a rolling motion. It was supposed to carry six or eight passengers but often carried many more than that. The driver's seat was at the top of the body in front, and at the back was a "boot" to hold trunks and baggage. A light iron rail around the top, made an extra place for storing baggage when necessary.

The drivers became master hands, and though the roads were bad, usually brought their passengers safely to their homes.

The people in those days were especially kind to each other and tried to get fun out of their work. They had quilting bees, husking bees, barn raisings, bees for drying apples and other gatherings. In this way they did a great deal of work, and had happy times with their neighbors at the same time.



Stage coach running between Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo. Picture taken at Plainwell in 1870.



In the winter the young people loved to get in the bottom of a big sleigh and then go for a ride. Sometimes when they got to a large deep drift, the driver would tip the sleigh over just for a joke and throw them all out in the deep snow. They thought that great fun and nobody was ever cross about it.

For a long time boats ran between the Rapids and Grand Haven and the young people made a special effort to be on some porch on Prospect Hill in time to see them coming in to the landing, especially if the little band happened to be playing.

The men and boys often played baseball in the square which is now Fulton Street Park. It was surrounded by a fence which was just high enough to make a good seat for those who wanted to watch the games.

In the same square were held celebrations of many kinds. One Fourth of July, when the people were enjoying fireworks, a sky rocket went off sooner than was expected, and the stick went right through the window of the low house which is now the home of Miss May Godfrey.

One Decoration day soon after the war, the school children met in the park to sing songs in memory of the soldiers who had been killed. After this service, they were taken in carryalls decorated with red, white, and blue, to the cemeteries to scatter flowers over the graves.

## CHAPTER X

## THE TOWN

**W**HEN the state was divided into counties in the early 30's, the name Kent was chosen for this county in honor of Chancellor Kent, a lawyer of New York. Though Mr. Kent had died nineteen years before, his name was still held in the memories of the inhabitants.

As soon as there were enough people in the settlement to make schools necessary, the town was organized. It was also called Kent until 1842, when the name was changed to Grand Rapids. The rapids of the river, for which the town was then named, are a mile long and have a fall of eighteen feet in that distance. So the slope is gradual and scarcely noticeable.

The officers of the new organization were given charge of the schools, public highways and the granting of licenses. They were allowed to buy and sell land for village purposes, and were given control over the police and fire department. The town grew fast because there was good soil, plenty of lumber, good water-power, also limestone and gypsum.

Factories of different kinds were built, giving work to many men. Then doctors, lawyers, merchants, tailors, teachers, ministers, carpenters, plumbers, engineers, street men, dealers in ice,

coal and wood, and livery men came with their families to live here. The city charter was granted in May, 1850.

In the year 1845, when the town was still young, the people began to petition for a railroad. In 1858 trains began to run over the Detroit & Milwaukee Road, which was an addition to the Detroit & Pontiac Road begun several years before. The rails were of wood and the train was run by horsepower, so traveling was slow and tiresome. The first train came to the city in July, 1858, and there was a great celebration.

Later other railroads were built and many improvements were made in the roads and trains, and Grand Rapids became quite a railroad center. Other roads going through the city now are: Lake Shore & Michigan Southern, Grand Rapids & Indiana, Michigan Central, and Pere Marquette, besides three interurban lines.

At first there were but one or two trains a day. Now there are trains going and coming all day and all night.

## CHAPTER XI

## THE STREETS

THE first wagon roads to the village followed the paths which the Indians had made, and were crooked. For several years scarcely anything was done by the town to straighten or improve them. One trail came in from the southeast past Reeds Lake to the place where Lake Drive now joins Fulton Street. Another lay where State Street now is, winding around Prospect Hill and then turning toward the little trading station at the foot of Huron Street. One came from Grandville also to the same point. Another one came from the north through the Mill Creek valley, and a lighter trail came in at Coldbrook. On the west side of the river, trails came in from Muskegon and Grand Haven and other hunting grounds lying in that direction.

Very early streets were laid out and the width planned about as they are now, but it was a long time before they were improved. In the meantime they were made passable with pieces of narrow plank sidewalks and little board or log bridges across streams and mud-holes.

As late as 1845 it was almost impossible to travel on Monroe and Canal Streets, now called Monroe Avenue, in wet weather on account of mud and clay. A small brook ran across Canal Street

at Lyon Street and over it was a narrow plank bridge.

Since that time a large amount of money and a great deal of time have been spent in grading the streets, cutting down the high hills and filling in the low places. Canal Street was raised several feet at its lower end; the eastern channel of the river was filled in partly by nature and partly by men, making the four islands which were south from what is now Pearl Street, a part of the mainland. The city market and the baseball grounds are now located on what was once known as Island Number Four.

Many of the hills on the eastern bluff of the valley have been graded down, and some of the west side has been raised. Part of the early work on the streets was done on the country-road plan, men working to pay their taxes.

Old Monroe Street was a trail over Prospect Hill, and as the town grew, became the main street.

The first pavements were poor and lasted but a short time. At first a thin layer of sand and gravel covered with limestone, was put on the soft deep mud. This was good for a time, but soon began to have holes, so was worse than no pavement at all.

After that at different times planks, cobblestones, pine blocks, and cedar blocks were tried, but none of them were found satisfactory. Now cement, macadam, asphalt and brick are most commonly used.

Barclay, Bridge, Lyon, Butterworth, Coit, Campau, Jefferson, Wealthy and some other



streets were named after people who did a good deal for Grand Rapids. Cherry Street was named for the black cherry trees that stood near it. Coldbrook Street was named after Coldbrook Creek which runs through the city. Canal Street was so called because it was near the east side canal. Division was the dividing line between two ranges of hills. Fountain Street when so named began at Ransom, where there was a good spring of clear water. Island Street extended from the east side to the river near one of the islands. Ottawa Avenue was named for the tribe of Indians that lived here. State Street lies where the old State road entered the village. A college was to have been built on what is now College Avenue, but though the street was named for it, the college was never built. Prospect Avenue ran across the top of Prospect Hill, which gave a good view of the city. Spring Street was named for the springs near by. Several streets were named after Presidents of the United States. Recently many names have been changed, and they are now so arranged that all of the avenues extend north and south, and the streets east and west.

## CHAPTER XII

## THE BRIDGES

WHEN the water was low enough, the early settlers drove through the river and at other times used a ferry. This was a pole-boat or a scow, crossing the river below the upper islands, landing on the east bank about halfway between Pearl and Fulton Streets. The west side landing was almost directly opposite.

Many of the people had their own canoes and skiffs, and in the winter they could often walk or drive across on the ice.

A summer foot-bridge was made by using wooden horses and planks, but until 1845 there were no bridges for teams.

The first bridge in the county was built at Ada, the expenses being paid by the state. The first bridge in Grand Rapids was a plank and timber bridge upon eight stone piers built at Bridge Street. Nearly all of the material for it was found in the Grand River Valley and the people were proud of the fact. The bridge lasted seven years. The next one built at Bridge Street was a latticed one with a shingle roof. This one stood for six years and was then destroyed by fire. It was a toll bridge owned by a company, and all other people had to pay to go over it.

Since that time three other bridges have been

built across the river at Bridge Street, three at Leonard Street, two at Pearl Street, one at Fulton Street and a few others. The two new cement bridges at Bridge and Leonard Streets are strong and beautiful and will probably last for many years. All but the railroad bridges are now owned by the city so they are free to the public.

## CHAPTER XIII

## THE WATER SUPPLY

**I**N THE days when few people lived here, there was plenty of water for all their needs, as there were several good springs of pure water in different parts of the town. However, as soon as they began to live close together, it was no longer safe to use water from the surface. So the spring water was turned into log pipes for the people down town and used by the Grand Rapids Hydraulic Company. The pointing and fitting of the logs was done by a ship builder.

Soon there were more customers than the Hydraulic Company could supply with the spring water, and after a few bad fires, the city decided to have a water supply of its own, and use the water from the river. So in 1874 the City Water Works were begun.

A reservoir was built on the hill near Livingston Street, and a pumping station on the river bank at the mouth of Coldbrook Creek. The water was pumped directly into the mains, and all that was not needed for use at once went into the reservoir to be used when the pumps were not running, or in case of special need. A crib for filtering was put in the river, with a pipe extending to the pumping house well.

The first pipes were wooden ones. The inside was bored and all of the sap-wood was taken out. Then the pipes were wound three times with strong hoop iron, and finally covered with asphalt in liquid form. They lasted about fourteen years, after which iron pipes were used.

After a time the city stopped using Coldbrook and Carrier Creeks as the water was no longer thought to be pure. For a long time people drank either well water, or spring water which they bought from one of the several water companies.

Recently some new pumps have been bought, and a large filter plant built which purifies the water before it goes to the mains, so by paying a small water tax, people can get pure drinking water by going to their own faucets.

## CHAPTER XIV

## THE SCHOOLS

THE early white settlers were anxious to have their children educated, so for a time sent them across the river to the Baptist Indian Mission. After a short time schools were held in barns and upstairs in private houses. The first school house for white children was a little log building built in 1837. Miss Bond, who had taught in the Baptist Mission, was the teacher.

The first stone school house was built on Ransom Avenue, southwest of the place where the old Central Grammar School stood later.

Most of the schools in the early days had long desks on two sides of the room, and seats made of slabs of wood, smooth side up, with sticks for legs. The rooms were heated by large square wood-stoves which stood in the center. The children who sat near the stove were usually too warm, and those at the ends of the room too cold. The larger boys cut the wood which was furnished by the parents.

School began at eight o'clock in the morning and closed at five in the afternoon, having a short recess at noon for lunch. It was in session six days in the week and most of the year. The only holiday on which it was closed was the Fourth of July.

Since then the schools have improved and grown until now there are night schools, ungraded schools, manual training schools, auxiliary schools for the exceptional children, schools for the deaf, open air schools, and private and parochial schools besides the regular public schools.

Each school has a library for the children, the books being furnished by the Ryerson Public Library. Eight schools, Alexander, Buchanan, Coldbrook, Hall, E. Leonard, Palmer, Sigsbee and Turner, now have branch libraries for the public, and plans are already made for opening libraries in the Franklin, Lexington and South High schools.

## CHAPTER XV

## THE CITY AND ITS INDUSTRIES

**W**HEN Michigan was new and for years afterwards, there were many lumber camps in different parts of the state. During the winter the logs were cut and piled along the banks of the rivers ready to be floated down to the mills as soon as the ice went out in the spring. Grand River played an important part in this business, and as there was good water-power near the Rapids, saw mills were located here at an early date.

The first one was built on Indian Creek in 1833 for the Indians. Some granite stones were put in this mill to be used for grinding corn and other grain. Later these were taken by Mr. John Ball to his home for a horse-block, and now stand in front of the museum. Other saw mills were built soon after.

Later, factories for manufacturing furniture and many different articles were built along the river banks. The first furniture factory was put up in 1836 at the corner of Kent and Hastings Streets, by Robert Hilton and Sylvester Granger. That same year they also built the first turning lathe, on the bank of the river, below the old ship-yard at the foot of the rapids.

In 1837 Mr. Hilton and a Mr. Solomon built the



first chair factory, located on the corner of Ionia Avenue and Fountain Street.

In the days of the Baptist Mission, Chief Noon-Day showed Mr. McCoy some crude gypsum lying on the west bank of Plaster Creek a short distance from Grand River.

Later it was discovered that large beds of gypsum near the surface of the ground lay in that part of the valley. So a small mill was built and the work of quarrying, grinding, and calcining was begun.

As the demand was greater than the supply, many people decided to invest money in the new business, so other and larger mills were built, and the manufacture of stucco and calcined plaster was begun. One of the early comers had learned how to calcine gypsum before he came here, so he took some of the rock, pounded it into small pieces, had it ground at an Indian mill, boiled it in a caldron kettle and made stucco. At first it was not very good, but later became most satisfactory.

The plaster and lime mortar made here were first used in Mr. Campau's house, the lime being burned in a kiln near the river.

Stucco was first used in 1834 as a finish for the gable ends of a house built by Richard Godfroy, one of the pioneers.

Some of the early settlers tried to use gypsum stone as a facing in blocks and houses. It looked beautiful, but was not at all satisfactory, as it separated into parts when it became wet.

Alabastine was invented by Mr. Melvin Church

in 1877 and has since become well known as a wall finish.

Many ways of using gypsum have been found, and as the products made here are the very best, they are sent to all parts of the world.

In 1836 Mr. Richard Godfroy built the first steamboat, the "Governor Mason," which made her maiden trip the following Fourth of July. At one time the boat was started for Ionia, and when partly over the rapids, her engines stopped. A messenger was sent to Rev. Slater, who brought out two yokes of cattle and towed the boat to the head of the rapids.

About that time Mr. John W. Pierce opened a book store on the corner of Kent and Crescent Streets. His was the first one in the valley and he remained there in that business until 1844, when he opened a general store on Canal Street. That year he built the first brick store.

The first newspaper in the valley was "The Grand River Times," published in 1837.

Mr. W. N. Cook built the first buggy that was ever made in the valley in 1842.

From the time these industries were started up to the present, progress has been almost continual. There are many manufacturing houses putting out high class goods.

The Bissell Carpet Sweepers are sent to nearly all parts of the world; the Sticky Fly Paper made in Grand Rapids is the only kind known; the knitting and printing companies do much business outside of the city; the brass findings rank among

